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ATROCITIES

. IN .

RUSSIAN PRISONS.

BY

FRANCIS DE PRESSENSÉ,

Président de la Ligue Française des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen.

(*Translated from the French.*)

SOCIETY OF FRIENDS OF RUSSIAN FREEDOM,
40, OUTER TEMPLE, STRAND, W.C.
1913.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

. OF .

FRANCIS DE PRESSENSÉ.

M. FRANCIS DE PRESSENSÉ, President of the *Ligue Française des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen*, is one of the most remarkable men of affairs in contemporary France. His political career has been as brilliant as it has been significant. No public man has shown such foresight and courage, such firm convictions and such fidelity to the Republican ideal as Francis de Pressensé, whose name stands out among those who at times of crisis have been found in the foremost ranks of the fighters.

Francis de Pressensé was born on September 30th, 1853. The son of Edmond de Pressensé, Protestant pastor and politician, and of Madame Elise Francoise de Pressensé, born du Plessis-Gouret, writer and poet, Francis de Pressensé passed his childhood under the influence of two enlightened minds, and surrounded by tender and intelligent affection.

His first studies were pursued at the Lycée Condorcet in Paris. He was sixteen and a half when the Franco-Prussian War broke out. He volunteered for service and went through the whole campaign. He was made prisoner at the battle of Alençon, and at seventeen he was recommended for the military medal and mentioned for bravery in the Army Order of the day.

At the close of the war Francis de Pressensé resumed his studies in the Faculties of Literature and Law in Paris. Having obtained his diplomas in these subjects, M. de Pressensé entered the School of Political Science in 1874. Here he became remarkable for his extraordinary capacity. In a short time he had made a profound study of the political situation in all modern countries. He was then invited to enter the ranks of diplomacy, and was successively Secretary to the Embassy at Constantinople, Washington, and London.

In 1888, having acquired a large amount of practical knowledge, he abandoned a diplomatic career and joined the staff of the great Paris paper *Le Temps* as director of its foreign policy. For eighteen years he wrote continuously for that journal, and

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his " bulletin de l'étranger," which appeared every day on the front page, had great authority in the political world. Successive Ministers of Foreign Affairs in France confided their plans to him, and were in turn influenced by advice based on exact information and inspired by the most exalted patriotism. Meanwhile he had become editor of the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, in which he published a remarkable series of articles on Cardinal Manning, which when issued in book form procured for him in 1897 a prize from the French Academy. He also published in 1889 a work on the history of Ireland *(L'Irlande et l'Angleterre depuis l'Acte d'Union)*.

In 1895 the Dreyfus Affair broke out. M. de Pressensé, having most thoroughly and minutely investigated this tragic story, quickly disentangled the truth, and from the very beginning of the campaign started by the late Lazare Bernard, became the most courageous and thorough-going defender of Dreyfus. He fought side by side with Emile Zola, Colonel Picquart, Senator Trarieux, Labori, and Clemenceau. He gave up his position on *Le Temps*, and became an ordinary collaborator with Clemenceau on *l'Aurore*.

Never having hitherto left the quiet of the study of a *savant* and publicist, Francis de Pressensé was the first of the " intellectuals " to brave the clamour of the streets and confront their Nationalist opponents in public meetings. His zeal and courage knew no limits. Often he spoke at the risk of his life. He broke every tie with his friends, and when Zola was struck off the list of members of the Legion of Honour, he tore off the decorations which he owed to his merits, and returned them with contempt to the governing authorities.

In 1897 he gave his adhesion to Socialism, and soon astonished the " professional " Socialists by his exact knowledge not only of the teaching of Karl Marx, but of every side of the social problem. In 1902 the electors of Lyons sent him to the Chamber of Deputies, where he at once acquired special authority on all questions of foreign policy. His speeches on the Eastern question, on Macedonia, and Armenia became classics. When he spoke there was always the feeling in all parts of the Chamber that a future Minister of Foreign Affairs was in the tribune.

In 1904 Francis de Pressensé became President of the *Ligue des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen*. His activity in that position has been prodigious. Innumerable have been the matters in which he has intervened. What is always striking about his interventions is the soundness of his argument, the breadth and loftiness of the point of view, and the exact knowledge of the details of each case. Not content with the many French matters, M. de Pressensé has never passed by any international question where the sacred principles of justice and right had to be defended. How many times, in the case of the prosecution of some refugees threatened with expulsion or

extradition has Francis de Pressensé raised his courageous voice and gained a victory. On one occasion the condemnation to death of a poor young Pole who was insane was brought to his notice. He did not hesitate to write an open letter to the Russian dictator Stolypin, and the letter stayed the hand of the executioner.

When he learned of the treatment meted out to the Russian political prisoners after the defeat of the Revolution, he set to work to study the question by means of authentic documents, and at a time when so many of his French colleagues, tired of the monotonous repetition of the complaints which came in such large numbers from the Empire of Darkness, declared themselves powerless to do anything, Pressensé, hearing only the voice of conscience, desiring to be consistent with himself and not to have to endure the remorse of having by his silence been an accomplice in such crimes, set out on a tour through Europe to address meetings on the Russian prison atrocities, hoping thereby to create sympathy on behalf of the Russian martyrs, especially on the eve of the Romanov Tercentenary when some measure of pacification might have been expected. This measure did not arrive. That, however, was through no fault of great-hearted men like Pressensé! In publishing his Address given in Paris on the Russian prison atrocities, our English friends will make known the truth by the pen of one of the most generous, most intelligent, and most far-seeing of contemporary writers and men of affairs.

E. Roubanovitch, Editor of *La Tribune Russe.*

ATROCITIES IN RUSSIAN PRISONS.

AN ADDRESS DELIVERED IN PARIS ON THE 13TH OF FEBRUARY, 1913, BY MONSIEUR F. DE PRESSENSÉ, IN THE SALLE DES SOCIÉTÉS SAVANTES, UNDER THE PRESIDENCY OF MME. VERA FIGNER.

BEFORE beginning the historical statement I am going to make, I ask your permission first of all to express my happiness at being here, under the presidency of Mme. Vera Figner. If there is anybody who is especially fitted to plead this cause, and every noble cause, surely it is she who has devoted her life to a great idea, who began by the sacrifice of her youth and liberty, and who, after having passed long years in the gloom of dungeons, compelling the respect of even her jailers, has, though but lately delivered from the Inferno, consecrated herself to the object of creating a kind of Red Cross for the relief of the victims of the terrible civil war which is raging in Russia.

Having said this, I will take refuge in a striking reminiscence. Nearly sixty years ago a great English statesman, Gladstone, then in the full vigour of his years, still a member of the Conservative party and ex-Minister of the British Queen, was forced for reasons of health to go to Naples. He might have led the indolent life of a tourist there, but, instead, he wished to study everything that was happening around him. It was the epoch of one of the most infamous reactions that has ever taken place in the history of the world. He saw a King who was a perjurer and a felon revenging himself upon men who had been his Ministers, and who had saved both him and his throne. It had pleased this monarch to condemn these noble men by courts-martial and special tribunals. He had sent them to convict prisons. Gladstone desired to visit these abodes of horror. He found there, among many other victims, a distinguished statesman, a moderate Liberal called Poerio, who had been the Premier of King Bomba, and who had won honour during the progress of the Revolution by his character and talents. Poerio was chained to a criminal, a murderer. Reaction had already invented that refinement of

torture to inflict not only physical suffering upon its victims, but to wound their dignity by attempting to degrade them.

Gladstone was indignant; he felt he could not keep silent about such facts. He thought it his duty to speak, not only as a man, but also, and pre-eminently, as a Christian and as a Conservative. He wrote that famous letter to the British Premier, Lord Aberdeen—a letter which is a masterpiece of burning eloquence, and an exact statement. The Premier understood; he did not seek refuge in an ignominious neutrality; he did not, like Pilate, wash his hands; he saw a great duty to be fulfilled, and he fulfilled it. Without delay he gave instructions to the British representative at Naples, who spoke openly and firmly to King Bomba, and finally wrested from him a nearly general amnesty, while, first of all, Poerio was set at liberty. Thirty years later Poerio, the whilom convict, died—a Senator of the Kingdom of Italy, a respected member of the Moderate and Conservative party.

Thirty years before, other incidents of the same kind had taken place. Francis II., Emperor of Austria, and his Chancellor Metternich had been infuriated against those Italians who dreamt of the unity and independence of their country. The reaction of the Holy Alliance under the Restoration Government was at its height. Nevertheless, public opinion in England, on the Continent, and especially in France, protested forcibly against this outrage against humanity.

At the present time, in an Empire not far removed from us, especially in virtue of political ties, events of the same kind as that which aroused the wrath of Gladstone are taking place. We see the perpetration of a series of outrages that give rise to the question whether public opinion in France, false to its traditions, to its duty, to its own inclinations, intends to hide itself behind I know not what wretched pretexts of supposed diplomatic interests, or other still more ignoble pleas of anti-revolutionary solidarity, in order to shirk a sacred duty.

I cannot claim to be a Gladstone—I have not his eloquence, I have not his rank in the State, I have not his influence; but when irrefutable documents were placed in my hands I felt it to be my duty to expose events which are now taking place in the prisons and dungeons of Russia; to do this objectively and historically, without making the slightest appeal to the passions of my audiences, appealing only to their reason, to their conscience. I should have failed in my duty had I not raised my voice as I have done in the past, and as I am doing to-day.

I know only too well that the state of public opinion to-day is not the same as it was sixty years ago. We are witnessing a strange reactionary movement which bears not only upon the principles of democracy, of Liberalism, but even upon certain essential elements of humanity and of civilisation, and which attacks even the fundamental principles of that

rationalism which was formerly the honour and strength of the French spirit. Nevertheless, if we can succeed in completely and widely making known the facts which have come to our knowledge, we have the right to hope for assistance which was not given to us at first.

I address myself to those whose fathers formerly struggled against slavery and the slave trade. I call upon those who themselves have protested against the scandals in the Congo Free State, those who took part in the grand fight for justice during the Dreyfus affair. I want to tell them that they will be false to themselves if they do not now range themselves upon our side in this new battle. I call, too, upon those who profess the Christian religion, and I declare to them that they will shame their faith, and that they will show themselves singularly unworthy of the principles they proclaim with their tongues, if they fail to understand the great duty of fraternity and solidarity which should unite them to us for the purpose of putting an end to the abominable scandal of the Russian penal administration.

I address myself also to all those who are still Liberals—and there are a few—and I tell them that the essential principles of Liberalism are at stake in our enterprise. And I address myself also to Conservatives. I ask them: Can you believe that a *régime* resting upon such a basis can claim to be a legal *régime*, an established order? Can you not see that it is the worst form of anarchy, and that it is preparing and justifying the most terrible reprisals? If you do not wish to reap the whirlwind it is high time for you to insist that this Government should cease to sow the wind.

Yes; it is high time that these things should be said and proclaimed from the housetops, and there is a country in which it is particularly essential that it should be done. That country is France, because France at the present time has a quite special *rôle* to play with regard to Russia. Circumstances have brought it about that the home of the revolution—I speak of other times!—has become the mainstay, alas! sometimes the accomplice, of the counter-revolution of the Tsars. Those who, like myself, still think that the Franco-Russian alliance at its outset was justified, that it was prescribed by considerations of legitimate international equilibrium, but who deplore the fact that it has been violated and perverted from its primary object and its true spirit, must take heed lest France should be disgraced by becoming the accomplice of crime committed in the great Empire she calls her ally.

For all these reasons, then, I make this appeal, not to a particular party, not to those who hold some particular shade of opinion, but to the whole body of men who think, who reflect, who have remained faithful to the fundamental principles of modern law. One recollection, however, encourages me in spite of everything, in spite of all discouraging con-

siderations. In former times, when the reform of the common law prisons was being taken up, when the first human glance penetrated to these dark places and discovered all the crime and horror hidden in them, the great-hearted woman who took that tremendous task upon herself, the English Quakeress Elizabeth Fry, found allies everywhere, in all parties, in all classes, and it was thanks to the co-operation of all honest people that she secured the triumph of that reform.

As for me, I feel assured that, however imperfect the account which I shall endeavour to give you, inadequate as my words may be, there is not one among you who, becoming acquainted with certain facts which have been brought to my notice, will fail to say: This crusade is necessary; it is holy; it would be good if all France were to devote herself to it.

It is not my object to make a party speech; I will try to give you an account as objective and complete as possible. I have drawn my facts from authentic sources; I have tried to test those sources in the manner and spirit of the critical method. They are of three kinds—statistical and legislative documents, and the official reports of the Russian Government itself; articles published in juridical Russian reviews, such as *Pravo*, or in certain newspapers, such as the *Novoye Vremya* and the *Retch*. I may say, for those who know what the censorship means in Russia and the *régime* which dominates the Press, that once facts are published in these reviews and journals without being contested or denied we may accept them as authentic.

Another source has been the pamphlets and articles published abroad by Tolstoy, by Kropotkin, by Vera Figner, the reports of the latter made to the Society for the Relief of Russian Prisoners, and certain articles which have appeared in *L'Avenir* and *La Tribune Russe*.

You will be astonished at first when I mention the third source: the letters, messages, communications which arrive almost regularly from the depths of the Russian prisons and dungeons. There is something astounding in this at first. One is inclined to ask how communication between the interior of the prison and the outside world can be maintained under the *régime* which I am about to describe to you. A little reflection and some historical recollections will suffice to disperse this surprise. One need only recall, for instance, what took place in the French prisons under the old *régime*. Surely they were places as terrible as hell! The prisoners were subjected to torture, they suffered from misery, from hunger, from the uncertainty of the period of their incarceration, and nevertheless such disorder reigned within the prisons that communication was constantly kept up by the prisoners among themselves and with the outside world. In certain cases plots were hatched in the interior of the prisons, and criminal enterprises planned.

Well, there is something analogous in the condition of the Russian prisons. In view of the enormous mass of prisoners crowding the prisons at the present time, it has been necessary to enrol a great body of jailers. The jailers are of two distinct types. Some are mere brutes, such as we see here in our disciplinary battalions, who, intoxicated by their omnipotence, abandon themselves to an orgy of uncontrolled and unlimited power. Others are ordinary men, neither very bad nor very good, who have taken up the job because they are obliged to earn a living. These, on entering the presence of the prisoners, are struck at once, and, in spite of themselves, inspired with a certain respect by their mental and moral, and, I will add also, by their social superiority. More than that, being very badly paid, they have a natural weakness for money. And it is thus, thanks to these jailers, that it is possible to establish and maintain relations with the prisoners. It is thus that at the present time almost constant communication is kept up between the living world and the Russian dungeons—those abodes of the dead.

We have at our disposal documents which we have not the right to publish in their entirety, because, in some cases, by giving descriptions too exact, or by describing certain crimes in all their abominable details, we might call attention to individuals who would become the victims of fresh vindictive treatment. By means of these existing relations, prisoners can send communications out of the prisons and can themselves receive not only letters, but also poison, which some have used to escape their misery by means of suicide.

Above all we are struck by a remarkable contrast between the *régime* of the Russian prisons seven or eight years ago and that of to-day. Though Russia has lived in the traditions of an enlightened despotism, of the philosophical Tsarism of Catherine II., the friend of Diderot, d'Alembert, and Grimm, the profession of the great principles of humanity in that country have been assuredly a farce and a lie. It was nevertheless a sort of lip homage paid to the fundamental ideas of the modern spirit and modern justice. Thus, for example, for nearly a century Russia has claimed to have abolished capital punishment, save in the case of certain exceptional crimes against the State. You will soon see that this is a fiction. It was nevertheless a useful piece of hypocrisy which exercised a certain reflex action on the condition of the Russian prisons. Tolstoy says that capital punishment had so entirely ceased in Russia that for many years throughout the immense Empire, which comprises I know not how many thousand square miles and millions of inhabitants, there had been only one hangman.

Now things have changed—death is everywhere. To form an idea of the sacrifices the Revolution has cost since its outbreak a little more than eight years ago we must, following the review *Sovremenny Mir*, take into consideration all the irregular, extra-

judicial executions during, say, the "pogroms" or massacres of the Jews, or in the course of punitive expeditions, those outbreaks of murder and rapine conducted by the Black Hundreds, an alliance of demagogues and common criminals. These are the figures quoted by the *Sovremenny Mir* for five years of pogroms and punitive expeditions: killed, 21,183; wounded, 31,117. During the punitive expeditions in the Baltic Provinces from 1st December, 1905, to 1st February, 1906, there were 18 hanged, 621 shot, 320 killed during the fighting.

Putting aside the figures of this accessory work as a kind of undergrowth of the counter-revolution, let us consider exclusively the number of the so-called judicial condemnations.

I will give some figures from official statistics. In five years, from 1906-1910, the total number of condemnations for all kinds of crimes in Russia was 37,620—that is to say, 7,524 a year, 627 a month, 20 a day. Of these the expressly political condemnations (I say "expressly" because the actual reasons for the condemnations were not always stated, while in certain cases they were described in the reports as "expressly political condemnations") were 19,145—that is to say, more than 50 per cent. Condemnations for propaganda, for belonging to so-called illegal societies, for offences against the Press, numbered 9,323—that is to say, nearly 25 per cent.

Now let us consider the death sentences passed during that same period. The number of death sentences passed from 1906-10 was more than 8,100. Of these 5,735 were passed for political crimes. The total number of executions was 4,366, of which 3,741 were political executions. The contrast with the period of the eighty years succeeding the attempted insurrection of the Decembrists—*i.e.*, from 1825 to 1905—is striking. During those eighty years the total number of condemnations for crime of all kinds—including probably a certain number of condemnations for the Polish insurrection—was 1,008. The total number of condemnations for political crimes as expressly stated was 623, and the total number of executions, mostly for political crimes, was 525. Thus, during a period of eighty years there were 525 executions, during five years 3,741!

Let us compress these figures still further. Taking the period from 1908-1911, the last year of the official publications, this is what we find:—Condemnation to death for political offences in 1908, 1,959 (note that the counter-revolution was already triumphant in 1908); in 1909, 1,435; in 1910, 438; in 1911, 257. The total number of death sentences during these four years, and after the triumph of the counter-revolution was 4,489; the total number of executions was 728 during 1908, 583 during 1909, 129 in 1910, and 58 in 1911; total, 1,552.

As will be seen, the Government has been lavish in its condemnations to death. It imagines, perhaps, like many doctrinaires with reactionary ideas on punishment, that death is the

supreme penalty, the most terrible, that which excites the highest pitch of terror. Strange error! It has been proved that even common criminals for the most part have an infinitely greater dread of the indefinite prolongation of a monotonous punishment in prison isolation than the brief tragedy of a sudden end with all the sinister *éclat* of a sensational execution. And how much more certainly may this be said with truth of men who have deliberately sacrificed their lives to a great cause! They are its martyrs. They accept the final sacrifice with a stoicism which at times amounts to joy. There are quite decisive documents with regard to this, published by the great writer Korolenko in a series of moving articles on capital punishment. He quotes the following lines written to his parents almost at the moment of his execution by a man condemned to death :—

> How are you, my dear parents, dear Father and Mother, dear Brothers and Sisters? At this moment I am in my cell, and they are just going to take me to the scaffold. Five of us are to be executed. I think you know very well what I have been, and I shall be neither the first nor the last to die; they have put me into a dark cell, so that in writing I can see neither the letters nor the lines on the paper.
>
> Dear Father and Mother, dear Brothers and Sisters, read this letter, and, I pray you, don't cry, don't spoil your health and strength; you are weak enough without that; I beg you not to cry. Be proud of your son; I shall die proudly and courageously, I shall look death in the face. I have no fear of it. I am very glad that my torments will be ended. I was sentenced on the 29th of October, and it is now the 22nd of November. It is about midnight, or one o'clock, and I am joyful, I am proud to think that I shall not die a coward. This is my last good-bye. I kiss you all, Father, Mother, Basil, John, Catherine, Marie, Barbara. Good-bye. Good-bye.—NICOLAS KOTEL.

The sudden and quick execution is not terrible. That which is terrible—and the Government knows it well—is the waiting, especially when it is accompanied by alternate hope and despair. The prisoner's attitude is at first one of almost unassailable stoicism, but he is soon brought to the condition described by another prisoner tortured by uncertainty :—

> As I write this note I am afraid that the door may open, and that I shall not have time to finish it. How uneasy I feel in this sinister silence! The slightest noise makes my heart beat with anxiety. A door creaks . . . But it is below. I will go on writing. I hear a step in the corridor, and I fling myself towards the door. No, it's another false alarm; they are the steps of a warder. The dead, terrible calm oppresses me. I feel stifled. My head seems made of lead, and drops helplessly on to the pillow. But, all the same, I will finish my letter. What was it I wanted to write to you? Yes, it was about life. Doesn't it seem ridiculous to speak of it when, here, death is close beside us? Yes, quite close to me. I feel his icy breath;

the ghastly phantom is always before my eyes. . . . One gets up in the morning, and one is glad, like a child, to be still alive, to have another whole day in which to enjoy life. But then, again, what a night! It is sufficient to describe the torture it brings with it. . . . It's time to finish now, nearly two o'clock. I can sleep peacefully now. They won't come to fetch me to-day.

This was a prisoner who had begun with a kind of stoical tranquillity, and ended with this nervous agony. At first he had written in a tone of almost absolute indifference, even with grim humour:—

You ask me how I pass my time? It is difficult to say. I can hardly give an account of it myself. I can only say one thing: my soul is calm, even very calm. I look positively joyful. I laugh from morning till night; I have told various funny anecdotes, I think. Of course, one sometimes dreams of life. One becomes a dreamer for a minute or two, and one tries to forget all this, for everything on earth is ended for me. And as everything is ended, I try to chase away those thoughts. I see that I have very little time to live, and in those short moments I can decide nothing. It is better to forget everything, and to pass the last days as gaily as possible, than to worry one's head in vain. I don't know how to describe myself: I look abnormal. Sometimes I want to poison myself. To poison myself just when I please. For I don't at all want to go out and die in some courtyard, still less if it should be damp or raining. I should be wet through before arriving there. And it is not very nice to be hanged when one is wet. And then they take us out in the night. Just when one has fallen fast asleep they wake one up, and disturb one. . . . It's better to take poison. . .

The Government endeavours to plunge these men into the depths of anguish by prolonging their misery. It has no inclination to sustain the courage of the condemned by any solemnity in the manner of their execution. It makes the final scene as vulgar and banal as possible.

Formerly an execution was accompanied by certain enhancing ceremonies which exalted those who participated in it, either as executioners or victims. Korolenko has described this. He describes a military execution of former days: the soldiers assembled, the officers full of emotion, the condemned allowed to make their farewells, and to take leave of the living world, north and south, east and west, in a sort of ritual.

Nowadays the thing is accomplished in a very different manner. A condemned prisoner, who was awaiting his own execution and had assisted at those of his comrades, writes as follows:—

Dear N. N.—I don't know whether this letter will reach you, as I am not sending it in the usual way, and it is not stamped. . . . I want to describe to you in detail the execution of our four comrades in the night of the 5th of November. At five o'clock in the evening the Director of the prison came

into our cell and told us that our comrades who were condemned to death had been pardoned. We almost believed him, the more so that the condemned had presented a petition to the Commander-in-Chief of the Moscow circuit, and it might very well have happened that the Commander-in-Chief had commuted the death sentence to that of life-long penal servitude. In reality it was nothing but a cunning ruse on his part. He knew very well that the execution was to take place that night, and he wanted to keep us quiet. The condemned knew nothing until the very moment that the hanging commenced, so that they could not even say good-bye to their families. But some of us did not believe the Director, and decided not to go to bed that night. I fell asleep about midnight and noticed nothing unusual. Towards three o'clock I was awakened; somebody cried out, "They are taking us!" I awoke my comrades, and I ran to the spy-hole. I saw soldiers in the corridor (as a rule there are none there). Then the clanking of chains was heard, and the sound of many steps on the asphalte of the corridor. A moment later several soldiers passed by the spy-hole. The four condemned were in the middle of them. The condemned were in their shirts, with no other covering. They had taken them straight from their beds without giving them time to dress. The sound of suppressed sobs was heard above that of the clanking chains, the footsteps, and the low whispering of the warders. Surkov, one of the condemned, was weeping like a twenty-year-old boy. They led the prisoners out into the courtyard and took off their irons. Then they took them to the place where they were to be hanged. It was freezing that night. A cold wind was blowing. Soldiers were stationed all round the walls on the inside, and Cossacks on the outside. They had chosen for the execution a place which could not be seen from the windows of the cells. There were no gallows; they were replaced by a fire-escape ladder propped against the wall of the prison. They brought the condemned to their places, read the sentence and invited them to confess and take Communion. Two refused and two took the Communion. Surkov continued to sob, the three others tried to console him as well as they could. Nogin, one of the condemned, was remarkably calm in spite of his age (he was seventeen). Then they commenced the hanging. They hanged them one by one. Each prisoner was obliged to wait until the body of the comrade hanged before him was stiff. I've heard that two of the prison officials were the executioners. They were masked in order that nobody should recognise them. We are not sure yet who the executioners were. . . .

At the present time they do these things in the night, after having deceived the comrades of the condemned who would wish to say good-bye to them. It is an evil deed done in the dark, and above all they hope by small ignominies to break the firmness and energy of those who are to die in the midst of such a sinister and sordid *mise en scène*.

In spite of all, it is not the death penalty that strikes supreme terror. The prison is incomparably worse, more cruel, more intolerable. The number of prisoners and convicts has been multiplied prodigiously during the last few years.

We do not protest, we should not dream of protesting, against the application of the law, even a severe, a cruel law, against men who have been beaten in a heroic fight. On the contrary, that which we have the right to protest against as a crime of the deepest dye is this—that the Government at the moment when it professes to curb its enemies by a legal yoke, when it is applying the full rigour of the law against them, systematically violates the law itself. Not one of the provisions of the penitentiary *régime* is respected, and it is that fact which I am trying to lay before you.

First of all, it has been made impossible to observe those articles of the regulations which define the space and the quantity of air to which each prisoner is entitled. And this is due to the simple fact that the Government has multiplied the number of its prisoners to an inconceivable, unheard-of extent. These are the official figures relating to the total number of prisoners in Russia during fifteen years:—In 1893, 77,000; in 1899, 84,000; and by degrees we arrive in 1905 at 91,720. In 1905, the year of the revolution, the number perceptibly diminished. It fell to 85,000, but since 1906 there has been a formidable leap in the increase of numbers. In 1907 we have 111,000; in 1908, 171,000; in 1909, 173,000; in 1910, 175,000; and in 1911, 180,000, and these 180,000 by no means represent the total number of persons in captivity. There must be added three categories of prisoners who do not figure in statistics—those on the way to places of deportation, those detained in the cells of police-courts, and minors condemned to correctional punishment; in all about 40,000 persons.

As the prisons have been constructed for the purpose of holding a hundred thousand prisoners, this means a surplus of 220,000. It is not difficult to imagine the natural, inevitable consequence of such a state of things. It means the overfilling, the overcrowding of cells and common-rooms. For example, in certain prisons there are rooms built to accommodate fifty or sixty prisoners, which are now made to contain eighty or ninety, even a hundred. A hundred prisoners are cooped up in these narrow, badly ventilated, badly lighted rooms. They are forced to remain there, sometimes without ever going out, without ever getting a breath of fresh air. Summer and winter, as the review *Pravo* declares, the double windows are kept closed; the vent-hole is only opened for a few moments at certain times, at the wish of the warders; the air is unbreathable The unhappy creatures cannot move; they are so tightly packed that they cannot sit down, and they have no work, no occupation. One can imagine what life must be under such conditions. They are forced to remain immovable, standing or sitting for eighteen hours a day, ninety or a hundred crowded into a room intended to contain forty prisoners.

The consequences are natural and inevitable. There is first

of all the profoundly painful moral contact between the "politicals" and the common law prisoners, often taken from the class of the most brutal criminals. Then there is the physical contact These men are often in one of the various stages of tuberculosis. Some of them pay attention to their state of health; others conceal it for fear of being taken to the infirmary, and thus losing the society of their comrades. There are many diseases which rage in those choice places the Russian prisons—scurvy, dysentery, sometimes cholera, and, above all, consumption, which spreads and multiplies its victims with the aid of these monstrous conditions, overcrowding, and the total absence of hygiene. There are also prisons in which syphilis is endemic, like the Boutirky prison in Moscow, where no care is taken either in the washing and distribution of linen or in the baths. Sometimes, too, syphilis is spread on account of the sleeping conditions. According to the prison regulations, each prisoner must have his own bed and certain articles of bedding, such as sheets, a blanket, and a bolster. But there are prisons in which the prisoners have no separate beds. There are prisons in Siberia—at Zarentouye for instance—where they are forced to sleep upon the benches and tables. There also two batches of prisoners succeed one another in the same beds during one night—the first batch sleeping from nine o'clock at night till two in the morning, the second from two to seven, in the same sheets. Under such conditions the most elementary hygiene is absolutely impossible. It is thanks to such conditions that the epidemics which ravage the Russian prisons have sometimes carried off sixty, or even seventy, out of a hundred prisoners.

The same state of things prevails with regard to nourishment. It is impossible to provide the food prescribed by the prison regulations. I know that there are legends believed by simpletons, and spread abroad by the enemies of progress, which tell us that the prison is a palace where the prisoners feast. In any case, this does not apply to the Russian prisons. One cannot connect them with epicurean *menus* and scandalous ease. The prison regulations prescribe the strict necessities of life. They are supposed to have fixed the exact balance between too much and too little, but they are not applied anywhere. Would you like to know the exact quantity of nourishment distributed to these unhappy sufferers? First, they are always given soup, sometimes thick, sometimes thin, but always insufficient in quantity, to say nothing of its quality. Then they have bread which is so badly kneaded, badly leavened and badly baked that it is uneatable, and is very often refused by the prisoners, even when they are hungry. In Algachi in Siberia, 600 prisoners are served with soup which contains ingredients apportioned for only 300. There is only one meal during the day, at midday; the prisoners are provided with a bowl of soup described as thick, in which is contained 50

grammes of meat refuse, which is nearly uneatable. On fast-days—and Heaven only knows how many fast-days there are in the Russian calendar!—instead of this soup the prisoners receive little bowls of potato-soup made with diseased roots. Every two days a kind of *bouillon* is served, two tablespoons to each prisoner.

Such is the dietary, such is the universal *régime*. At the Boutirky prison in Moscow the food is so bad that it provokes nausea, and the epidemics which have decimated the inmates of the prison may be attributed to it. It has provided us with the strange spectacle of a prisoner who, rather than touch the tainted food, prefers to eat nothing but little pieces of sugar and dry biscuits.

Prisoners who have the means to provide for their own meals are forbidden to spend more than *six shillings a month* for the purpose. When one reflects that out of these six shillings they have to buy such necessary articles as needles, cottons, and stamps, it is evident that only a few pence remain for the supplementary nourishment of which they stand in need.

Thus they live, crowded together in a narrow space, packed like herrings, unable to move, breathing foul air. In certain prisons exercise in the courtyard has been forbidden because the yard is too small.

Twice a year, at Christmas and at Easter, the prisoners are let out for half an hour, in order to lay in their stock of fresh air! This is related by the journal *Pravo*.

If only they could have some work to do, "moralising" work! The law mentions this point especially, and speaks of "forced labour." Well, it is a review of moderate opinions, *Pravo*, which remarks upon the bitter irony of this language. Forced labour does not exist. It has been abolished because it was found to be not only "moralising," as they express it, but also "consolatory," for those who work can forget their sufferings at intervals.

Work has been systematically suppressed, and the prisoners condemned to idleness so maddening that when some chance job turns up, such as the chopping of wood or the carrying of some logs, the prisoners vehemently dispute the right to this favour, this diversion, this remedy for physical and moral suffering.

As for the work which is still kept up, it has been made so absurd, so absolutely useless, that it is impossible for the prisoners to apply themselves to it without disgust or depression. One can only compare the effect of it to that formerly produced in England by the treadmills, those penitentiary wheels turning to no purpose. The same depression, the same almost invincible discouragement, is produced by work rendered futile by a cruel imagination, such, for instance as the carrying of faggots, planks, or logs, from one place to another and back again.

On the other hand, purely penitentiary work, which adds

still further horror to the lot of the prisoners, has been kept up. Cotton and wool picking is carried on in the Central Orel prison, the horrors of which establishment I shall have to describe to you. The workrooms are arranged in such a manner that the air in them becomes loaded with dust and fluff. It is impossible to breathe in them, and at the end of a few hours the healthiest lungs will be poisoned; any one who remains there for more than a week is condemned to the deadly and implacable tuberculosis, which will carry him at a swift gallop towards the graveyard.

All other kind of work has been suppressed, and only exists on paper. Forced labour may have a place in the Code, but this article of law is not applied in any of the prisons. Even in Siberia circumstances had created a sort of moral privilege for some of the convicts; some had been employed on the building of the trans-Siberian Railway, or on the Amour Railway. Although they were subjected to a *régime* of extraordinary severity and to implacably rigorous handling, the work was an unspeakable joy to them. They saw the sky. They could breathe. They worked. It was too much. Their state was too enviable. The work was forbidden. By this measure the fundamental provisions of the Penal Law in Russia were violated. The Code is nothing but an empty word; legality means little! Once started upon this road, they pushed on still further and violated the law regarding the "penitents"—convicts who have fulfilled certain conditions and given certain satisfaction. By law they had the right to enjoy certain privileges. But these privileges were confiscated; they vanished. First of all the authorities discouraged, and finally prevented, their wives and families from joining them, as they had the right to do by law. When, by chance, a prisoner was still able to get a little work the authorities wished to deprive him of the slight consolation of earning a modest sum. Formerly, a convict could aspire to learn the veritably fabulous and exorbitant sum of a halfpenny or three farthings a day! This was scandalous. An ukase, a circular of the Director of Penitentiary Establishments, has fixed the maximum earnings for the prisoners (in certain prisons at least) at three farthings a month! So that when a prisoner by exceptional good luck can manage to find work during twelve months he will find himself at the end of that time in possession of the magnificent sum of ninepence!

All these things have created a scorn for the provisions of laws, regulations, and circulars. And when the Penitentiary Congress meets in St. Petersburg or Moscow it is careful to put a good face upon this legislation, to have its humane and philanthropic provisions read with edification, with feeling. It refrains from showing the reality, from revealing the true state of the unhappy people who ought to have benefited by these privileges, who have lost them little by little, who, suffering

in the name of the law, are made the victims of the perpetual violation of the law. That is the reality!

What, then, is the object of such a policy? A double object—first of all, revenge. Those who are considered as enemies must be made to suffer as much as possible, therefore they are delivered to the arbitrary rule of infamous jailers, recruited from the most brutal and barbarous stratum of the population.

That is not all; this vengeance is not enough. Something else is needful—to crush the activity, the energy, the will of these men, to degrade them in their own eyes, to make them incapable of ever resuming the struggle; and it is desired sometimes to attain an object most precious to despotism—to see some of those who have struggled against it, who have stood up like men, who have sometimes performed acts of heroism, and who now, discouraged, despairing, vanquished, degraded, I repeat, in their own eyes, fall so low as to beg for mercy, and sometimes even to promise to pass into the service of the enemy.

Such are the objects of this policy, and the odious practices which I have just enumerated to you are not sufficient to attain it. It is not enough to reduce the vanquished to a state of intolerable misery, to that of men entombed, suffocated, forced to live for years together in close contact, elbow to elbow with companions in misery, some of whom are objects of repulsion, without occupation, distraction, or diversion, without an opportunity of gaining a single breath of pure air. That is not enough; the attempt has been made deliberately, and by actions which must be revealed to the civilised world, to humiliate and degrade them in the eyes of others, and finally in their own. That is the system, the system of the actual director of the Administration, of the whole Government, of the Tsar himself, in whose name all this is done. The *régime* was summed up in the words which escaped one of the jailers, a former under-officer of gendarmes, who had been dismissed for some peccadillo or other in the Army, and promoted to the superior grade of chief warder in the prison of Kalouga. This man one day stopped short in front of his prisoners and said to them:—"I am Vassily Ivanovich Zakrouzhky, and I am your Tsar and your God." He spoke truly. The lowest-grade jailer is a Tsar and a god. The prisoners, especially the "politicals," must address him as though he were a being of a superior order. He has the right to treat them with constant insult and outrage, to question them, addressing them as "dogs." He can with impunity fling the most filthy epithets at them. They are obliged to touch their caps respectfully to him, to rise immediately and reply to his coarse insults: "Thank you, your Excellency. How is the health of your Excellency?" They must use not only the most courteous language to him,

but also the most basely flattering behaviour. That is not all. If they resist, if they show the slightest hint of, I will not say revolt, but resentment, they are confronted with the certain prospect of the "black-hole."

The use of the black-hole is also regulated by imperative dictates of the law; but nobody pays the slightest attention to the law. One article says that the term of detention in the black-hole must never exceed seven days at a stretch. Yet there are a number of prisoners who can bear witness to the fact that at Vladimir, at Orel, and in the Siberian prisons a prisoner has often remained for thirty, forty, and even fifty-one days in that hell. What is the black-hole? It is an underground hole without light, without air, where the prisoner must lie on the bare earth or on the cold stones. His clothes other than his underlinen are removed, or if now he is left even that much protection from the cold, it is only since the issue of a recent circular in response to protests raised in France, and I do not know whether that is still in force. During his long incarceration in the black-hole the prisoner receives nothing but 2lb. of dry bread a day, with a little salt, and some water. At the least sign, I will not say of discontent, but of sadness or of melancholy, the jailers fling themselves upon the captive, force a strait-waistcoat upon him, or punish him—as at Orel—by binding and raining blows upon him.

At this point we are reminded of the gloomy story of an attempt to proceed still further upon this path of vengeance, an attempt which provoked the most profound emotion in the prisoners and their friends, even in the cowardly public of our times. I speak of the attempt to inflict the punishment of flogging upon the politicals.

Of course they must have got accustomed to assault, to brutality, to blows. How many times during the roll-call, the morning or evening visit, do the jailers fall upon a prisoner tooth and nail for some trifle—because he has not risen quickly enough, because he has risen too quickly, because one of his buttons is loose, because his cap is not put on at the prescribed angle, for any cause, or for no cause at all! How many times do they bring the victims to the point of death!

Statistics from the prison at Pskov are edifying in this respect. The official inquiry which I possess is still more eloquent. An inquiry unparalleled in the history of civilisation, relating to the hard labour convicts who had been subjected to the punishment of flogging with rods, was instituted in one of the prisons not far from St. Petersburg, and which, according to the author of the inquiry, was not remarkable for any particular form of abuse.

The inquiry covered a period of two years—from June, 1909, to June, 1911. The number of persons who had been submitted to corporal punishment (not counting prisoners who had since been transferred to other prisons, those who had died, or who

concealed the fact of their humiliation) was eighty-eight, and they had received among them 4,200 strokes in all.

For what reasons were these men, many of them men of high culture, subjected to this punishment?

"The most numerous category is of those who, instead of replying to the Director's greeting in the servile terms imposed upon the common-law prisoners, answered simply, 'Good-day, Director.'

"The second category is that of prisoners who suffered because of a spy whom the Administration had placed among them. Certain prisoners had received fifty strokes for having stated, or even begged, that they wished the spy to be removed from their cell. One prisoner received twenty strokes for having expressed the wish that the spy were not there.

"For having prevented the spy from smoking, fifty strokes.

"For having insulted (!) the spy, thirty strokes.

"For having beaten a spy, one hundred strokes.

"Other reasons for corporal punishment:—

"Refusal to go to church.

"Refusal to accept a red egg at Easter from the authorities.

"A request that an Assistant-Director might be more polite.

"Laughing at the Director.

"Saying that the food was bad.

"Making fun of the Director.

"Writing verses, which, in the opinion of the Administration, were of a revolutionary character.

"Giving tobacco to a comrade.

"Asking a comrade for some tobacco.

"Refusing to denounce a culprit.

"Speaking to a fellow-prisoner during exercise.

"Not cleaning the pail properly.

"For each of these offences prisoners received from twenty to fifty strokes apiece.

"Even the following reason was given:—For having picked a flower during exercise, five strokes of the rod.

"And, lastly, a prisoner was punished with the rod simply because he was 'a Jew!'"

Such things were formerly considered more or less as the accidental abuses of a tyrannical *régime*, and not the legalisation of a degrading punishment.

But now this last step has been attempted. They have dared to take it already in some prisons in the interior of Russia, in Boutirky, Vladimir, and Orel. The Siberian prisons, in which there were a great number of political prisoners whom in spite of all it was customary to treat with respect, had so far been spared.

The moment seemed to have come in which to crush them also beneath the yoke. Then occurred those profoundly

stirring tragedies, like that of Koutomar, and that of Zarentouy, in which Sazonov lost his life. Sazonov was certainly an extraordinary man; he was the executor of justice on von Plehve; his act inaugurated the revolutionary era, properly so called, by the execution of that too resourceful Minister. By an extraordinary chance he was not condemned to death.

Sviatopolsk Mirsky, the Minister of the Interior, who succeeded von Plehve, had semi-Liberal tendencies, and only condemned Sazonov to a term of imprisonment. He was moved from prison to prison, never allowed to stay long in the same place. The authorities feared his influence, his authority, his prestige. He was one of those who could create new energy, and whose courage was a perpetual example of heroism. Finally, he arrived at the Siberian prison of Algachi. He learnt to his grief that corporal punishment had been introduced there, and that many of the politicals had had the weakness to submit to it. There was an urgent necessity to put an end to the evil. Sazonov entered into a solemn agreement with some of his friends to commit a collective suicide in order to intimidate the Administration. His great hope was that such a measure must assuredly exercise some influence upon their torturers, and that they would not dare to repeat their cruelties in the face of it. The hour came. Sazonov swallowed the poison he had procured. But unhappily it was not strong enough, and he awoke from stupor with a terrible pain in his head. The heads and jailers of the prison considered it expedient to remove him immediately, for fear of his gaining too great a moral authority by his attempt to save his comrades at the expense of his own life. Upon leaving he was filled with the bitter realisation that his attempt had only succeeded temporarily, if at all, and that sooner or later the torturers would resume their diabolical practices. It was a check. In his new prison at Zarentouy a *régime* of infernal terror reigned. Jailers and soldiers were like demons let loose. Orders were given that Sazonov should be hunted like a wild beast. If he showed his face at his window he was confronted by a soldier who shot at him. Then the same sport was indulged in without any movement at all on his side, so that he lay at the bottom of his cell while the bullets rained above his head.

It was decided to aim at a great *coup*, to defy Sazonov by vigorously renewing the reign of the lash in his presence. This meant deliberately urging him to his death. Sazonov was quite near his time for being set at liberty; he only had a few weeks to serve before regaining at least partial freedom. But this did not deter him. He remained firm in his resolution to make the sacrifice of his life; to become a willing martyr in a great cause—that of gaining respect for the vanquished.

This time the poison was efficacious. Sazonov died after having written a letter in which a sublime idea shone forth, a new gem of the literature of death, dark as night, vivid as lightning, such as are bequeathed to us by so many revolutionists, who are no mere phrasemakers, and who, in consequence, possess the incomparable eloquence of heroism.

When this story was published, when Russia became acquainted with the tragic knowledge that she had lost one of her noblest sons, there was, in spite of everything, a movement of profound indignation, even in the Western Press, which is now so cringing and cowardly, held in leash by its masters, and which pays small attention to such matters. Even in the Russian Press there was some timid echo of this universal sentiment.

There might have been some persons who believed that the sacrifice of this life and the shudder of sympathy it aroused would check the monstrous attempt to dishonour the "political" prisoners, to reduce them to the level of the ordinary criminals in order to humble their spirit and paralyse the sources of their energy. These people were very naïve.

A short time later, tragic incidents of the same kind occurred in the Siberian prison of Koutomar. There, too, some "politicals" resolved not to tolerate the humiliation of the lash, and they kept their resolution. When they heard the sound of the lashes falling upon their comrades, whose groans and cries penetrated even to their cells, they immolated themselves without hesitation, without delay. Thus there were five dead bodies, five more martyrs to protest against the infamy of the Russian Government.

Such are the latest prison tragedies.

So, after having violated the legal regulations concerning punishment and the penitentiary *régime* from the first to the last letter, after having torn the Code into a thousand pieces, the authorities set themselves an infamous task. They said to themselves—we are going to degrade these fighters in their own eyes, we are going to outrage their pride, their most sacred feelings, their personal dignity. We will subject them to the humiliating torture of the lash, like little boys, or, rather, like hooligans.

And these are not isolated stories, exceptional incidents, things which happen in a certain place on a particular day and are not reproduced elsewhere on the morrow. The truth is that a *régime* of terror, oppression, and illegality reigns in the prisons all over Russia. In order to give you some idea of this I cannot do better than read you some pages from the memoirs of a prisoner at Orel which appeared some weeks ago in a Polish paper in Cracow, and signed Peter Sergeyev. I will take some passages by chance which breathe a bitter grief, implacable resentment.

This is a description of the prisoner's examination after his entry into the Orel prison :—

" ' For what were you condemned ? '

" ' Under Article 102 for having belonged to the Socialist-Revolutionary party.'

" ' You don't know how to answer, you dirty beast ; but I'll soon teach you. Forget that you've ever been a student, you thief ! '

" ' Sir, you have no right to shout at me and insult me.'

" ' There's insolence for you ! '

" All of a sudden I felt something burning on my head and back, and shoulders. I fell on to the cold stones. I bit and scratched and tore with my teeth anything I could get hold of. My body was as though in a furnace, but I felt no pain. My mouth was full of hair and blood, and one eye was blurred. I can only remember the last blow I got—a kick straight in the face with a nailed boot. I could see nothing but green and yellow circles I fainted. . . .

" I was still in a deep swoon when I was taken to the hospital.

" My first feeling when I awoke was one of intense joy. I was still alive ! How good it is to live ! I tried to move, but I groaned with pain and fainted again. '

He explains the special conditions through which he was saved :—

" I remember coming to myself at the hospital. People can very rarely survive such treatment. I was saved principally because of my physical strength, and also thanks to the care of one of my custodians, who, finding that he had come from the same part of the country as myself, nursed me, in the character of compatriot. I fell into a state of utter depression ; life or death—it was all the same to me. All desire to live had left me, yet I had not even the strength of will to seek death. I even ceased to resent insults. I felt nothing but physical pain. But my soul was full of despair and grief for the human dignity crushed and lost for ever. . . . "

And he describes certain other scenes :—

" I am ashamed to tell of all that I have lived through.

" I remember the exercise, for instance. It took place in the courtyard of the prison, under the superintendence of the assistant-director and the chief warder. The prisoners walked two and two, with measured step, holding themselves straight, and wheeling round at the command of the officials. It is forbidden to speak, or even to turn your head. A walk may be a rest and a diversion, but our torturers had managed to convert it into a new torture. We always returned to our cells miserable and depressed. I would willingly have forfeited this privilege, but the exercise is obligatory.

"'Fall in, you dogs!' shouted an officer, degraded from the Army, who played the important part of chief warder.

"'Well, how are you, my hearties? There s a set of rascals for you! How are you, you rascals?'

"'Quite well, your Excellency.'

"'You dog of a Jew, why don't you answer?' he said, addressing a thin, weak little Jew. 'How are you, you villain?'—and he accompanied the words with a blow. 'I'll teach you to answer! Take him to the cells!' And he was dragged away.

"'Walk! Why do you walk so badly, vagabond?'

"'I don't know how to walk better. I haven't served in the Army yet.'

"'You haven't served? Well, then, I'll teach you!'

"One of the guards, the most cruel and brutal of all, was appointed to teach him to turn, to half-turn, and to wheel round. And each movement was accompanied by a kick or a blow. These torments were inflicted for half an hour every day, and I don't remember a single day when nobody was beaten.

"The principal inspector of the prison admired the order and discipline of the prisoners whenever he visited us. What a bloody price we paid for the maintenance of that order and discipline! The morning and evening inspection furnished abundant opportunities for assaults and insults. The guards and warders habitually assisted at the ceremony."

He describes the miseries of the "black-hole" and of the wool-picking:—

"The most terrible tortures are the black-hole and the wool-picking. Of course the black-hole is not heated in winter, and the prisoners have no clothes on but their underlinen. They are thrown on to the horribly cold stones. Prisoners who resist are thrust into a strait-waistcoat, tied hand and foot, and dashed several times upon the ground. Nobody can stand this treatment, and it has the most horrible results.

"But the wool-picking is still more horrible. The quarters where it is picked are permeated with poisonous dust. There is literally no air to breathe, and after half an hour your eyes are red and inflamed. Nobody can stand it for more than three or four months. Acute tuberculosis sets in, and one of two things remains for the prisoner—the hospital or the graveyard!

"A dear face, never to be forgotten, rises in my memory. It is that of one of my comrades. In the presence of his dead body I swore to bring to light all I knew of that abominable prison. We were University friends. He was a healthy man, full of ardour and energy. He had consecrated all the strength of his pure young soul to the good of the people. His sentence was severe—five years of convict-prison.

We had been together for some years in prison in St. Petersburg. We had worked together, shared our dreams together, as if we were preparing to enter a splendid University. It was he who sustained us by his joyous, tranquil humour. The very look of his animated, resolute face reawakened our courage, and made life seem easier to us. He shone like a star amid the miseries of our dark horizon. I hoped to be sent with him, for I felt that the heavy trials would only serve to strengthen the courage in his soul. But after a year and a half I was sent to the South and afterwards to Orel, while he was despatched to Vladimir.

"Eighteen months passed.

"I was nothing but a living corpse; I dared not even recall our dreams and plans.

"The days passed; one evening I was told that my friend had arrived in Orel. I could not close my eyes all night. Once more I lived through all our sufferings, all our despair. I wept for the soul of my friend, and for my own. I knew that he would not submit to an insult; more than that, he was marked as a prisoner who had tried to escape. Two anxious days passed without news. On the third day I learnt that he had hanged himself in his cell. It was said that his body was mutilated, and, in any case, he was hastily buried.

"A criminal prisoner who swept out the cell said that he had seen the body hanging, already cold."

Such are the dramas being played every day in Orel, or in the prisons of Siberia. Those who resist, whose spirit cannot be daunted, are unable to submit to these humiliations. They end by seeking the only door to salvation—suicide. And when suicide, like the heroic suicide of Sazonov, is committed, not in order to escape one's own sufferings, but in the hope of protecting one's comrades from new tortures, every upright soul must bow respectfully before it. There are some who turn to suicide as a means of their own salvation. They have sought some door of escape and have found but that one. As for me, I would not dare to pass judgment upon people who, after having struggled bravely, after having committed deeds of heroism, have been forced to a desperate act.

They perform it sometimes with an astonishing simplicity; like the young schoolmistress of whose death Korolenko has told us. She was afraid of making some admission, of letting some dangerous secret escape in the face of the torture. Without a word, without the slightest attempt at pose, she determined to die, and asked one of her friends to procure some poison for her. This friend has described the final scene, and I will give here a short extract from her account:—

"I waited till the evening. What a long, terrible day! When all were in bed I took my knife and began to cut through to the opening, which was stopped with clay. . . . After a few minutes I could see the light in her cell. . . . The

aperture appeared, and she called me by name. Oh, my God, I must give it to her! . . . I felt her take my gift. . . . Then I passed two letters through. I riveted a greedy glance upon the opening. She was reading.

"At that moment Stephanie from the casemate begged me to ask Raïa when she was going to take the poison, so that they might take it at the same time. What affection!

"How they loved one another! . . . There was a sound of chains. She had finished reading then. . . . My dear, I was talking for a long time to her. I finished my letter in words. At last I begged her to bend a little towards the opening, so that I might see her. And I saw her pretty, pure face. How happy I was! She looked at me and laughed, softly, softly. 'Do you hear, Endel, I am laughing?' she said.

"'Yes, my little one, I hear. What are you laughing at?'

"'It seems so funny to see one another, and to know how to talk to one another still.'

"Then she asked me what you were doing.

"'Where is Anatole, where is the country?' she said. 'Give my love and kisses to Nadin.'

"Then she went away. After a moment she came back again.

"'Stephanie asks "When?"' She said, 'To-day. When the guard has been changed. Will the cyanide act?'

"'Yes, darling; I couldn't get you anything else!'

"I felt frightfully agitated. To place death within the reach of a friend one loves, when we want so much to live! It is terrible! . . .

"'Don't be so upset, Endel,' she said. I was quiet, and then she said something. At last she asked how the poison should be taken.

"'Crush it to a powder, and mix it with a little water.'

"'Very well. I'm going to take it soon.'

"When the guard had been relieved there came a tap, tap upon the wall. I went close to it.

"'I'm going to take it in a minute, Endel; but I haven't any water. What are our friends doing?' she asked. 'I think its done now. Good-bye.'

"'Good-bye, darling.'

"I heard the rustle of her dress and the sound of chains, then there was silence.

"'My little Raïa, have you taken it?'

"'Yes, I've taken it. Good-bye.'

"'Good-bye, darling.'

"Then there came a profound silence, which lasted several minutes. Then she gasped violently. Then came sighs . . . then a feeble breath . . . and at last louder sighs . . . then silence. . . . Gently, somebody has just died, but life will go on all the same. . . . I spoke to her; I heard everything. I was with her at the last moment. It is all

engraved upon my heart for ever. You say that Raïa is here no longer; but it is not true! I tell you that she is still here with me, and with all of us who loved her. She will live in us. . .

"After a time I heard knocks upon the wall, but it was not worth while answering. The warders had come.'

Such scenes are taking place nearly every day in the black-holes and prisons in Russia. It is time that these things should be cried aloud to the world, that it may be known that this parade of a penitentiary system with pretensions to modernism and legality is nothing but a lie, and that in reality this rotten *régime* is the most odious tyranny, a *régime* of physical and moral torture before which the horrors of the Inquisition itself would pale.

Several years ago when this era had already commenced, when this orgy of murders, this inundation of blood had been let loose in Russia, the Tsar's Government convoked a Congress for penitentiary reforms. Representative officials of all the penitentiary administrations in the world were present. I do not deny that there are some among them who even now are very much disposed to turn their backs upon the traditions and principles of human rights, French traditions in particular, and who desire the triumph of a penal reaction as stupid as it is unique. I know, too, how far the cowardice of officialism may go, and how, when one dons a uniform one often relinquishes the right to possess a conscience and to obey it. And yet, in spite of everything, I am sure that even among those men there were some who felt ill at ease, and who blushed when they understood that they were being made to serve as a sort of veil to hide all the crimes and horrors of the Russian penitentiary administration. When the tragedy of Zarentouy, the tragedies of Sazonov and Koutomar came to light, there was a movement of protest. Eloquent speeches were made, a beautiful letter of Maxime Gorky expressed what the hearts of men were feeling. The Russian Government took fright at the assertion of opinion which had formerly shown itself in such a servile light, and which so little knew what use to make of the force at its disposal. It seemed as though the Administration desired once more to pay the homage that hypocrisy pays to principle when it attempted to fabricate some excuses and explanations in the paper *Rossia*, trying to prove that everything within its pale was conducted in a legal and humane manner. But the task was impossible, and it did not succeed. Then a great display was made, and we beheld the Director of the Penal Administration, a man largely responsible for all the crimes committed under his rule, taking some of his less skilful subordinates to task, very gently and considerately, of course, and dismissing the Governor of the prison at Pskov. This functionary was the author of abominable scandals. It was never known how the prisoners managed to publish the

denunciatory letter which appeared in the local Press enumerating the tortures to which they had been submitted, and the grotesque and futile reasons for their cruel punishments. Then beautiful new circulars were issued to replace the old ones, containing the regulations relative to the black-hole. They quoted the article which says that no prisoner may be deprived of his clothes, and that in certain cases the black-hole must be heated. Had not a prisoner shut up in the middle of winter been seized with the insane idea of emerging from his icy hole with both feet frozen? Moreover the law decrees that the prisoners should be provided not only with bread but with hot soup every three days. This circular was published with great *éclat* and much advertisement. But to-day there is no sign of the beginning of its execution, or of its being held in greater respect than any of its predecessors. Nevertheless, it is a symptom of which we have the right to make use. There is at this moment a unique opportunity for the public opinion of the civilised world, if it shows itself worthy of itself, conscious of its strength and of its duty, to exercise its influence upon the Russian Government to put an end to these scandals. In a few weeks the Romanov dynasty, or that which passes as the Romanov dynasty, really the Holstein-Gottorp, will celebrate the third centenary of its accession to the Russian throne. All the world knows that when a government is celebrating the anniversary of its birth, or its inauguration, it loves to shine with a certain reflex of generosity, to give the impression that, in spite of everything it is animated by sentiments of humanity and philanthropy. Besides, sometimes it is very conscious of the fact that it stands itself in far greater need of the amnesty it prepares, within such very arbitrary limits, than those upon whom it is seemingly to be conferred.

And there is really a very urgent reason for, in a way, forcing the Russian Government to impart a serious and extensive character to its amnesty, not only a moral reason, but a material one—the overpopulation of the places of detention. There are 220,000 men in the Russian prisons where there should be no more than 100,000. This is a situation which cannot last, and the only graceful manner in which the Russian Government can remedy it is by making a liberal move, and allowing this amnesty to be applicable to the political prisoners.

I repeat that there is perhaps only one method of obtaining a beneficial result. I am not optimistic in these matters; I have good reason for not being so. When, as in my case, one has been for ten years at the head of a department which I may call the department of injustice, when one has been face to face with all the iniquities committed, not only in France—and God knows there are enough of them there!—but in the whole world, and when one has felt the difficulty, I will say almost the impossibility, of obtaining redress for most of them.

one cannot profess an optimism which would be not only naïve, but insincere.

In spite of this, I must admit, for experience proves it, that we have achieved success in the presence of difficulties which seemed insurmountable; we had an abundance of decisive arguments, we made appeals to reason, we triumphed in our struggle for justice in the case of Captain Dreyfus; we triumphed—too late, alas!—in the fight for justice for the workman Durand; and recently we triumphed when we fought for justice for the prisoner Rousset. Even in Russia, when acting in the name of the *Ligue des Droits de l'Homme*, I gained success after two attempts in a matter in which I had little hope of success. After two applications, the Premier, who was then Stolypin, consented to stop the execution of two men, one of whom was obviously mad, while the other was obviously innocent.

On the other hand, the *Société des Amis du Peuple Russe*, which has so often taken action, may also boast of having achieved a success, at least of esteem, when last year it tried so generously to interfere by issuing an appeal protesting against the Russian penitentiary *régime*. It is something to have obtained explanations from the Russian Government, even the explanations of liars and hypocrites. It is something to have wrested a reply from it, and something to have obtained the issue of that circular. Who knows but that in the end we may make it respected?

So that, in the face of events that are preparing, on the eve of the celebration of the dynastic tercentenary, and considering the overcrowding in the prisons, I believe that the mass of public opinion, putting aside all kinds of party considerations, can, if it wishes, interfere in the interests of humanity and put an end to this wretched *régime*, and that we may have the chance of claiming a victory.

And after all, even if we knew beforehand that we should be ignored, even if we knew beforehand that no notice would be taken of our just protests and of our just claims—even then, is there any one among us who does not see that such considerations can change nothing in regard to our sacred obligation to act, and to interfere?

We must act in order that we may not be justly exposed to the fearful reproach which the convicts of Pskov and Koutomar hurled at us when they wrote that because of the sluggishness of public opinion, because of the cowardly neutrality of those who folded their arms and refused to make the slightest movement, because of this compliant egoism they were discouraged to the point of lassitude and despair. Our inertia is all the more unpardonable because it destroys all faith in just causes and noble ideas.

As for me, I will not take such a responsibility upon my conscience. I, as a Frenchman, will not be an accomplice,

either from far or near, of the crimes by which the Russian Tsardom is upheld. I will not abandon the tradition which is the honour of my race, the maintenance of a firm solidarity between us and those who suffer, who struggle, and who aspire.

And, finally, I will make one more appeal, not only to my political friends, not only to those who hope, as I hope, that one day the Russian revolution will triumph and abolish the pestiferous *régime* of an autocratic and bureaucratic Tsardom, but even to those who think, on the contrary, that it is good for the revolution to receive an insurmountable check, and for the present *régime* to survive, and I say this to any of them who may be Liberals, or to any extent conscientious Conservatives—if you are Liberals you cannot abandon your fundamental principles, those which constitute the very essence of your humanity; if you are Conservatives you cannot consent to a lying *régime* founded upon the systematic violation of the law, to a Government built up upon so many crimes and scandals. I hope, in spite of everything, that in a short time we shall witness an awakening of conscience and of reason in the civilised world. It is high time.

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